

Middle School Initiative

**PART I
COVER SHEET**

CAP 5 SEMESTER 1 WEEK 3 & 4

COURSE: Leadership Officer Leadership Laboratory - Achievement 12

LESSON TITLE: Effective Writing

LENGTH OF LESSON: 110 Minutes

METHOD: Lecture/Discussion

REFERENCE(S):

1. *Leadership: 2000 And Beyond*, Volume II, Chapter 11
2. AFH 33-337, *The Tongue and Quill*, 30 Jun 97

AUDIO/VISUAL AIDS/HANDOUTS/ACTIVITY MATERIAL: Transparencies

COGNITIVE OBJECTIVE: The purpose of this class is for each cadet to:

1. Become acquainted with the methods required for writing effectively.
2. Know the procedure for editing and rewriting the document.

COGNITIVE SAMPLES OF BEHAVIOR: Upon completion of this class, each cadet will master the process of effective writing, whether for Civil Air Patrol or for school.

AFFECTIVE OBJECTIVE: N/A

AFFECTIVE SAMPLES OF BEHAVIOR: N/A

Middle School Initiative

PART II TEACHING PLAN

Introduction

ATTENTION: Good afternoon and welcome to the second/third hour of the Leadership Officer Leadership Laboratory.

MOTIVATION: Since we will be discussing grammar this period, here is a little quip that may be appropriate for our class. *In Any Debate On Grammar, The Number Of Opinions Will Equal Or Exceed The Number Of Grammarians.*

OVERVIEW: In the two hours devoted to this subject we will be talking about the use of acceptable, clear English, some basics of grammar, subject-verb-object word order, and the writing of effective paragraphs. We will also be looking at the process of editing, rewriting and polishing our product.

TRANSITION: A Latin proverb states, *"In writing readily, it does not follow that you write well, but in writing well, you must be able to write readily."* Simply put, if you are just rambling on, there is no polish in what you write. On the other hand, taking the time to edit your work will help your reader, or listener, understand your thoughts much more easily.

Body

NOTE: Teaching the variables of the English language is a chore that should not be undertaken by the unlearned. 'Tis best left to those that fully understand the intricacies of this language. You have as much leeway as you need to get this point across.

MP 1 Use of plain language. (Question) What are your thoughts about plain language? (Feedback from cadets might be listed on a chalkboard and summarized by the instructor.) All writers should use standard, informal English. Using standard English means using logical organization; common everyday words, except for necessary technical terms; "you" and other pronouns; the active voice; and short sentences. Non-standard English is not taught in school - it is what is used openly among members of various groups that are not completely literate.

Organize your material to help the reader. You should identify the receiver of your writing and write in a fashion that will gain and hold their attention and answer any questions they may have before they ask them. You might even consider any additional readers. Always start by putting your main message up front; when you bury the main message, you are making it harder on your readers.

Avoid any words or phrases that your readers might not understand. Any abbreviations or acronyms should be clearly defined the first time they are used. Use the same term consistently throughout your writing. Do not use language that may mislead your reader. A newspaper headline read, *"When Baking Cookies Include Your Children."* Just what did that say to you? It could imply that children might be part of the ingredients or they should be helpers in the process. Which way do you perceive it to read? Did the writer leave something out?

Use "you" and other pronouns to speak directly to your readers. People are not inanimate objects and should not be referred to as such. Refer to the reader as "you." This will reinforce the message that you are trying to convey to your reader. If you are writing about the organization, use the pronoun "we." If you imply your own opinion on a particular subject, the personal pronoun "I" is appropriate; such as, "I think" or "I believe."

TRANSITION: Now that we have discussed some of the things that we should do to write effectively, let's look at some examples of official writing, of years past, and see if anything can be done to make it simpler.

MP 2 Here is a very complicated instruction, written many years ago by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), about the seating of people in airplanes.

TRANSPARENCY LL12.2.1 - Seating Restrictions

Taking a look at this slide we find some very specific things that should be or should not be done in seating a person at an emergency exit window or door. (Cadets are to interpret each of the listed items and explain them, as best they can.)

TRANSPARENCY LL12.2.2 - Requirements for Seating in Exit Seats

What does this slide allow you to do, as a passenger in the airplane? Do you feel that this tells you what you should do to exit the plane in case of an emergency?

TRANSPARENCY LL12.2.3 - Can I Sit In An Exit Seat?

This slide tells you in very few words what you, as the passenger, need to know if you want to sit at, or near, an emergency exit window or door. As you can see, many words that appear to be very complicated can be reduced to a simpler form and not dumb down the instructions to open the escape door and leave the aircraft.

This is called the KISS method. (Keep It Simple, Sam)

TRANSITION: The simplification of instructions can help you remember the essential items that must be accomplished. When extremely technical material must be acted upon, it may be necessary to read the instructions word for word as the work is done. Comprehension, or remembering the material, is not necessary as you are working from a checklist.

In the previous section, we have shown that some things can be shortened and not lose its intent. This has been accomplished through the use of good grammar and sentence structure.

MP 3 **Basics of Grammar**

The Parts of Speech. There are eight parts of speech--Adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, interjections, nouns, prepositions, pronouns, and verbs. These will all be defined in just a moment. There are many more parts that are used in the development of a written sentence and these will also be discussed as we progress through this class.

Let's take a look at the eight parts of speech and determine how they fit into our everyday language.

TRANSPARENCY LL12.2.4 - Parts of Speech

NOTE: Basic definitions are found in the leadership manual. The text below expands those definitions to a more comprehensive level.

Adjectives - Adjectives are words that describe or modify another person or thing in the sentence. The Articles -- *a*, *an*, and *the* -- are adjectives.

- the tall professor
- a solid commitment
- a month's pay
- the unhappiest, richest man

If a group of words containing a subject and a verb acts as an adjective, it is called an Adjective Clause. Example - My brother, who is much older than I am, is an engineer on the railroad.

Adverbs - Adverbs are words that modify

- a verb (He drove slowly. - How did he drive?)
- an adjective (He drove a very fast car. - How fast was his car?)
- another adverb (She moved quite slowly down the aisle. - How slowly did she move?)

As you can see, adverbs often tell when, where, why, or under what conditions something happens or has happened. Adverbs generally end with the letters *-ly*; however, all words ending with *-ly* are not necessarily adverbs. The words *lovely*, *lonely*, *motherly*, *friendly*, for instance, are adjectives.

- That lovely young lady lives in a very friendly neighborhood.

Conjunctions - A conjunction is a joiner, a word that connects parts of a sentence. Some conjunctions are *and*, *but*, *or*, *yet*, *for*, *nor*, and *so*. If a conjunction is used to connect all the elements in a series, a comma would not be used:

- Presbyterians and Methodists and Baptists are the prevalent Protestant congregations in the state.

If the first *and* is dropped, a comma would be required as you are listing items and a comma may be used before the second *and*.

Interjections - Little can be said about interjections except to say that they are words or phrases used to exclaim or protest or command. Many times they stand by themselves, but they are often contained within larger structures.

- Wow! I won the lottery!
- Oh, I don't know about that.
- No, you shouldn't have done that.

A comma or a set of commas will follow a mild interjection. If the interjection is more forceful it will be followed by an exclamation mark. Interjections are rarely used in formal writing.

Nouns - A noun is the name of a person, place, thing, or idea. That which exists can be named, and that name is a noun. A proper noun names a specific person, place, or thing (Sam, Queen Elizabeth, United States, English, El Supremo), is almost always capitalized. Common nouns name everything else and are usually not capitalized.

Pronouns - Pronouns generally stand for or refer to a noun, an individual or individuals, or thing or things whose identity is made clear earlier in the text. For instance, we are bewildered by a writer who claims something like:

They say that eating beef is bad for you.

They, is the pronoun in this sentence, but who, or what, are *they*? The word *they* represents some thing or person. Could be the cows or the pork industry. This is a sloppy use of a pronoun.

I, *he/she*, *me*, *my*, *it*, *you*, *they*, and *we* are pronouns. The forms in which these pronouns are used are called cases. They can be subjective, possessive, or objective. Subjective means they act as the subject of independent or dependent clauses. Possessive shows possession or ownership, and objective shows the receipt of an action.

appropriate conjunctions and punctuation. Vary the length of your sentences. A good average number of words would be about 20.

MP 5 Effective Paragraphs

Paragraphs are the primary vehicles to develop ideas and serve these threefold purposes:

- To group related ideas into single units of thought.
- To separate one unit from another.
- To alert the reader that you are shifting to another phase of your subject.

Generally, you should build your paragraphs to meet the structural requirements of your overall communication. You can use examples, definitions, comparisons, and contrasts to develop each paragraph within your overall pattern. The main principle is to **develop one main idea in each paragraph**.

Each paragraph might contain just five to seven sentences. Following this practice will aid you in developing clear, easy to read paragraphs. This doesn't mean that all your paragraphs should be the same length ...that might be a wee bit boring to the reader and reflect inadequate development. Then again, that number of sentences may be too many.

The most important sentence in any paragraph is the topic sentence. It expresses the main idea of the paragraph and gives you a point of focus for any support material. It also prepares your reader for the support material that follows. In short, the topic sentence is the subject or controlling idea of the paragraph, and it directs the kind of information needed to support it.

When you write more than one paragraph in a communication, ensure that your sentences and paragraphs flow smoothly into each other. Varying the sentence structure serves a grammatical purpose since it improves readability and keeps your readers' interest. One of the easiest ways is to use different sentence openings such as adjective and adverbial clauses, prepositional and infinitive phrases, and transitional words. Be sure to use clear-cut topic sentences followed by good support and closing sentences. Your objective is to help your reader see your paragraphs as integrated units rather than mere collections of sentences.

MP 6 Editing and Rewriting Process

Here is the place to put the final touch on your communication, whether it is a speech or a writing assignment. Assuming that you have written enough to satisfy the length requirement or you've said all there is to say about the subject, it's time to put your paper through the rewrite process. Not everyone has word processing equipment available, so we will address the old, reliable handwritten method of editing and rewriting. Don't worry about misspelled words at this time. Watch for clumsy phrases in your writing and for gaps in your thinking.

Each paragraph must have its topic sentence, support sentences, and a closure. Are your thoughts all in order? Do they make sense to you? Have you used good grammar? Is the punctuation reasonably correct? These are just a few things that you have to look at while editing your work. Without changing anything, you might have someone else look at your work and have them evaluate it for content and whether they understand what you are trying to say. Do not use someone close to you as a proofreader; generally, they will not try to find all the errors in your thought processes.

Whatever method you use to assure that your communication is adequate, refining your work takes a considerable amount of time and effort. You may have to go over it several times to ensure that the subject you are writing about is thoroughly covered. You may have to adjust some of your paragraphs to make your words flow smoothly from one topic to the next. Do not be afraid to rewrite your work. You want it to be right, don't you?

Using the checklist in your textbook will aid you in developing "the perfect communication," one that you will be proud of. If you follow that outline, I'm sure that you will write an excellent speech or essay.

By the way, did you correct all of the misspelled words? Did you use the correct word, where the words sound the same but are spelled differently and have different meanings?

SUMMARY: During the two class periods on the subject of effective writing, we have moved through the intricacies of developing the use of clear, acceptable English by stumbling over some government gobbledegook and seeing it refined to easy reading, without loss of content. We have also taken a look at the various parts of human speech; things that we use everyday without realizing it. These parts and many others are incorporated into the writing of effective sentences and paragraphs. Finally, there is the requirement to edit and rewrite your assignment or speech to give it the polish it needs.

REMOTIVATION: *"Education should be as gradual as the moonrise, perceptual not in progress but in result."*
- George John Whyte-Melville

CLOSURE: To complete this period of instruction, you are required to read that portion of Chapter 11 in your leadership text on the subject of effective writing.

Middle School Initiative

**PART III
LESSON REVIEW**

LESSON OBJECTIVE(S): The objective of this class was for each cadet to become aware of, and ultimately master, the principles of effective writing.

LESSON QUESTIONS: The completion of the end of chapter review satisfies this requirement.